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CASEY CLAIMS NEWS MEDIA HELPS SOVIETS BY PUBLISHING LEAKED DOCUMENTS
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WASHINGTON

Central Intelligence Agency Director William J. Casey says the U.S. news media is handing vital information to the Soviets "on a silver platter" when it publishes leaked secrets, and he wants tougher laws to punish the press for such disclosures.

But Sen. Dave Durenberger, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said the Reagan administration is itself to blame for news leaks that have damaged U.S. spying efforts.

Both Casey and Durenberger, who traded barbs over the issue of leaks last fall, were part of an unusual colloquium Wednesday night that included two prominent investigative reporters, including James Polk of NBC-TV.

Casey asked the Justice Department last May 21 to consider prosecuting NBC for broadcasting a brief Polk report on the background of the Ronald Pelton spy case.

Before the evening was out, Casey told Polk he wasn't really a candidate for prosecution, and the spy chief assured the other reporter, Bob Woodward of The Washington Post, that he wasn't tapping any journalists' phones - including Woodward's.

"My daughter will feel much better," said Woodward, an assistant managing editor of the Post, who is completing a book on the CIA.

"Ask him about senators' (phones)," Durenberger said.

Casey told the 140 people at a meeting of the Washington chapter of Sigma Delta Chi that he will press for tougher laws to punish both government employees who leak secrets and the news media for willfully publishing sensitive information.

"The KGB and other hostile intelligence services every year spend billions of dollars trying to acquire this information. But the unauthorized publication of restricted information hands to them on a silver platter information that their spies, their researches, their satellites are working 24 hours a day to uncover and use against us," Casey said.

But Durenberger, a Minnesota Republican, said the administration itself let sensitive information slip on several occasions earlier this year to bolster support for the bombing of Libya and aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.

He cited the leak of a message from Libyan officials that was intercepted before the bombing of a Berlin discotheque last April 5, and a leak about U.S. spies within the Sandinista government that resulted in the arrest of three Nicaraguan officials.

Durenberger said Casey himself emerged from a White House briefing a few months ago and revealed that Soviet pilots were flying reconnaissance aircraft in Nicaragua.

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